

Choosing management after Class 12: Why Integrated BBA-MBA programs are gaining popularity

Explore the innovative IPM program offering a direct path to management education for Class 12 graduates, blending technology and managerial skills.

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The corporate world is increasingly demanding early-groomed leaders who possess a blend of technology and managerial skills. | iStock/Getty Images

Most students make their career plans while in school. They join Under Graduate courses of their choice based on that after Class 12. However, most students consider Post-Graduate (PG) courses in Management only after their graduation and aspire to get into the prestigious IIMs through the Common Aptitude Test (CAT). Recent initiatives by some of the IIMs to launch a five-year Integrated BBA-MBA as a premium program is set to change the situation.

Can management be considered a career choice by the students right after class 12, alongside other alternative professional courses in disciplines such as Engineering, IT, Medicine and Law? This article examines innovative management education formats that are being launched by the reputed Business Schools in India so as to enable the students and parents to take informed career decisions early.

Current status of enrollment in management programs at UG

As per the AISHE report 2021-22, only about 29% of the students enrolled in under-graduate programs in professional streams after Class 12, the largest being in Engineering and Technology (11.8%), followed by Education (5.2%), Medicine (5%), IT (2.8%), Management (2.7%) and Law (1.6%). Management was not among the top preferred choices for UG programs after class 12, possibly due to lack of awareness among the students on careers in management and also the absence of iconic institutions such as IIMs offering UG courses in management.

However, in the last five years, enrollment in BBA programs have grown by over 50%, with about 4,300 institutions, 80% of them in private, offering the program in which about 3 lakh students graduate yearly. The increased demand for the program may be attributed to the recent slowdown in placements for engineering graduates, forcing students to look at management as an alternative career option early on.

Challenges faced by management programs

Employability of BBA graduates has been lower than for other professional programs, both in terms of percentage campus placements and salaries offered, possibly due to a mismatch in the skills of the students versus industry expectations. Most recruiters seemed to prefer post-graduates for managerial roles. Due to this, a number of BBA graduates have been forced to pursue post-graduation in management, so much so that in most of the non-IIM Business Schools, about 30% the MBA students are BBA graduates.

A comparative study of the curricula of BBA and MBA of most of the Business Schools reveals that there is significant overlap between the two.

Standalone BBA four-year program formats from IIMs

Besides the traditional three-year BBA degree, in pursuant of NEP-2020, a number institutions have been offering four-year BBA programs, with the option of Honours or research in the fourth year. Recently, IIMs at Sirmaur and Kozhikode launched four-year Bachelor of Management Studies (BMS) program, with the first batch starting in 2025.

Students can opt for minors in areas like Economics, Public Policy, AI & ML and will have opportunities for international exchange and internships. IIM Sambalpur offers a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) in Management and Public Policy. These three programs have fees tags ranging from ₹20-25 lakh for the entire course. It remains to be seen what response is there from students for these.

Five-year integrated BBA-MBA

A significant recent initiative is the introduction of five-year integrated BBA-MBA Integrated Programs in Management (IPM), started by IIM Indore in 2011, making it the first of its kind in India. Followed by its success, it is now offered by six more IIMs (Amritsar, Bodh Gaya, Jammu, Ranchi, Rohtak and Sirmaur).

Besides the IIMs, other reputed central government institutions such as the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, Kakinada, NALSAR and IIT Mandi are offering it now. Even leading private B Schools such as the T. A. Pai Management Institute (TAPMI) Manipal, Nirma University, and NMIMS (in its six campuses) have introduced the program. This rapid adoption of the program by a number of reputed institutions validates the market acceptance of the IPM model.

This dual-degree program is considered to be ideal for bright, ambitious young students who, after Class 12, are interested in taking an early decision regarding a career in management. Admission for the program is through competitive national-level entrance exams such as the Integrated Program in Management Aptitude Test (IPMAT), conducted by the IIM Indore, and the Joint Integrated Program in Management Admission Test (JIPMAT), administered by the National Testing Agency (NTA), both of which are widely accepted by several other institutions. NMIMS has been selecting its students through the NMIMS Test for Programs after Twelve (NPAT).

In 2024, some 52,000 students appeared for IPMAT and JIPMAT tests and, out of them, about 770 students were selected by the IIMs, which works out a selection ratio of about 1.4%. This is less than the CAT selection ratio for MBA in the IIMs, reflecting stiff competition.

It is estimated that about 80,000 students took the NPMSAT test in 2024.

The IIMs follow the typical structure of a 3+2 model wherein the initial three years are dedicated for holistic development of the students through robust foundational inputs in a diverse array of subjects such as Humanities, Literature, Fine Arts, Mathematics, Economics, Statistics, Psychology, Sociology, Computer programming, alongside “durable skills” such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication and leadership.

As students advance, the curriculum transitions into more specialized, advanced management topics covering Finance, Marketing, Operations, Strategy, Business Analytics and Human Resources. It also strategically integrates core business disciplines with cutting-edge fields such as Artificial Intelligence and Technology. IPM model also avoids the duplication/overlap in the curricula of BBA and MBA.

The varied curriculum approaches by each institute highlight a strategic difference in how different institutions plan for early talent development. IIM Amritsar offers courses in Quantitative Finance and Economics, whereas IIT Mandi offers BBA in Analytics and MBA in Data Science & AI as early specialization.

A distinguishing feature of these programs is their strong emphasis on experiential learning. This is not merely an add-on but an integral part of the pedagogical approach, incorporating elements such as social internships, typically undertaken at the end of the second year, and business internships, usually positioned between the fourth and fifth years. Furthermore, students engage in live projects, field assignments, and simulations, all meticulously designed to prepare them for the complexities and challenges of the real-world business environment.

In the case of the IIMs, the students join the regular MBA students after the first three years. However, in other premier institutions, a separate program structure has been designed for the entire program.

IIMs charge ₹32-40 lakh for the five-year program, whereas other premier institutions charge ₹20-30 lakh for the program. The direct five-year path to management education for Class 12 graduates, bypassing the traditional undergraduate degree and separate MBA entrance examinations, caters to a segment of students who demonstrate early clarity about pursuing a management career.

Career progression and industry perception

Graduates of IPM programs of IIMs participate in the same final placement processes as their postgraduate program (PGP) peers, gaining access to top recruiters across diverse industries. Experience so far shows that the IPM graduates from the IIMs received premium campus placements in the same league as their flagship MBA graduates.

The industry perception of IPM graduates, so far, is largely positive, especially for those from the IIMs, whereas for other premier institutions, the branding is in the making. Though the total financial outlay for the IPM is much higher, compared to the traditional BBA and MBA, the integrated format promises long-term financial benefits to the students by way of earlier entry into a management career and accelerated career progression.

Projected growth in the next three years

As the IT sector goes through the challenges of AI impact on entry-level jobs, a technology-management career could be an attractive future-proof. A rewarding career opportunity will fuel increased demand for the IPM program.

The corporate world is increasingly demanding early-groomed leaders who possess a blend of technology and managerial skills. The IPM curriculum's integration of Artificial Intelligence, Technology, and a focus on data-driven decision-making directly addresses the evolving corporate demands. Furthermore, the growing emphasis on Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles and sustainable business practices in MBA programs aligns well with the holistic and socially responsible development fostered by IPM programs.

In response to this demand, there is a clear trend of expansion by educational institutions. In 2025, the number of IPM admissions in the IIMs is expected to grow by a healthy 30% to reach 1,000 and in other reputed institutions to about 3,000. More IIMs such as Lucknow and other premier private universities and Business Schools are expected to introduce the IPM program next year, whereas the existing ones are expected to increase the intake in the next few years.

It is likely that all the IIMs agree on a common entrance test for selection of students, as in the case of the MBA.

Way ahead

Looking ahead, the IPM model is poised for sustained growth, driven by increase in student demand and the corporate sector's need for early-groomed, adaptable tech savvy leaders. For the Business Schools, this presents an attractive opportunity, which they need to seize and structure the IPM in line with industry requirements, and groom the students as per their expectations.

For youngsters interested in a management career, it is an excellent option to get an early entry into industry with accelerated professional growth. Considering most of the managerial jobs may not be affected by AI, IPM can also build a future-proof career for them.

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